

## A STATE FOR THE FIVE TRIBES.

Overtures to Be Made to the Red Men for Home Rule Within the Union.

WASHINGTON, July 26.—One of the important subjects of investigation during the present recess of Congress is to be that of the capacity and willingness of the five civilized tribes of the Indian Territory to form a State and be admitted into the Union. A Commission of three persons was provided for by Congress, with a view to this investigation, and also to that of the willingness of these tribes, at all events, to accept severally allotments and to conform in other respects to the ways of white men.

A few years ago it would have seemed wholly premature to conduct this inquiry. The Indians were known to be wedded to their race isolation, as well as to their system of holding lands in common. One of the five tribes, in fact, only a short time ago endeavored to discourage the entrance of its members into full American citizenship by putting restrictions in tribal matters upon whoever should obtain it. The Interior Department was forced to interfere and explain that such legislation was against the policy of the Government. Again, in a convention of the five tribes held some years ago, very strong ground was taken against yielding to the new movement for allotting lands in severally or weakening race allegiance.

But of late there have been signs that the tribes are recognizing that a critical period in their history has been reached and that they cannot be sure of maintaining their present status. There are two parties on this subject, and hitherto the conservative has been the stronger. Many of those who have become members of the tribe through marrying Indian wives, are among the strongest advocates of holding to the old customs. This is largely due to the fact that they are able to use the tribal land for their own benefit, to an extent which might not be possible under a system of individual ownership. They are re-enforced in many cases by the weather and more influential of the chiefs, who are actuated by similar motives. But against them is growing up an opposition, based upon the desire to secure some of the prosperity that white communities achieve by the use of means similar to theirs.

Some of the Indians probably recognize also that the existence of Oklahoma as a Territory soon to become a State is a warning to them. It is time to take efforts are made to bring the Indian Territory proper, as it now exists, under the jurisdiction of Oklahoma, with a view to its ultimate absorption in the latter. The Indians cannot fail to see that in a choice between being merged in Oklahoma and forming an independent State of their own the latter course has incomparable advantages. As a part of Oklahoma, they would even now be outvoted and reduced to the position of a constantly dwindling minority, exposed to all the perils of race prejudice. But in a State of their own, capable of electing its Senators and Representatives in Congress, as well as of governing itself by members of the Indian race, there would be no such peril.

Of course there are safeguards in the laws against an enforced merging of the Indian Territory in Oklahoma. The Severalty Allotment statute expressly exempts the civilized tribes from its operations. The treaties made with some of the tribes also pledge the faith of the United States that no Territorial or State lines shall be drawn about their domains. Yet it is felt by some of the Indians that it is time to consider what further security and privileges Statehood might offer them.

One point very obvious is that the five tribes have been for many years accustomed not only to the rudiments, but to some of the advanced forms of American representative government. They have their Legislatures, composed of two houses, their Governors, their judicial systems, their militia force, their stated elections, and the vote by ballot. Accordingly, their entrance into the Union as a State has already been prepared for by some political education and experience. A second point to note is their capacity for self-maintenance as a Territory or State through their tribal funds. These latter, in some cases, are quite large. The Cherokees have just increased theirs by between \$8,000,000 and \$9,000,000, and the Choctaws and Chickasaws combined by about \$3,000,000, through land sales. The Osages, one of the smaller tribes in the Indian Territory, who would go with the five larger in a scheme of Statehood, are the richest of all.

But perhaps at first a Territory with Indians as officials, and the abolition of the tribal land system, is as much as could be looked for. The work of the three Commissioners has yet to be performed.

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